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The Prescient Librarian: Ilse Bry and "Sociobibliography"

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Abstract

In the 1960s, before computers enabled people to combine myriad terms in a single search and "interdisciplinary research" was just coming into vogue, Ilse Bry (1905-1974), a German-born émigré librarian working in New York City suggested that the lines between the behavioral sciences and individual disciplines were not as rigidly drawn as was assumed. With this in mind, she founded the *Mental Health Book Review Index* (1956-1974), compiling and making sense of book reviews from some 255 journals that, she believed, signaled trends in literature and the discovery of new knowledge. The essays she wrote for each issue were remarkable for their breadth of literary knowledge and appreciation of bibliographic applications. In 1977 Bry's writings were compiled in a book, *The Emerging Field of Sociobibliography*.(Afflerbach)

Figure 1. Ilse Bry in an undated photo before she left Germany. (Reproduced from Stern, 1976)

As a young woman, Bry studied philosophy in Berlin, Munich, and Vienna, Austria, where she received her Ph.D. degree with a dissertation on Spinoza. After passing the state examination required to qualify as a librarian, she began her library career as an assistant at the municipal library of Berlin-Charlottenberg. Bry's Jewish heritage cost her this job with the onset of the Nazi regime in 1933. She emigrated to the United States where, from 1933 until 1946, she worked as a bibliographer researcher, reviser, and cataloger at the Columbia University Libraries. During this time she attended Columbia's School of Library Service and received a B.S.L.S. in 1942. Her Ph.D. in philosophy and library degree were, apparently not enough for her energetic mind: in 1947 she completed a master's degree in psychology, also at Columbia. Her thesis was entitled "A Plan for Detecting Administrative Aptitude in Library School Students." (Bry, 1948)

In 1947, Bry became Librarian at the Manhattan-based New York Psychoanalytic Institute and Society. The Library's charge was largely the same as it is today: to document the history of psychoanalysis, particularly in America, and to support the curriculum of the Institute's training program for psychoanalysts.

Figure 2: The A.A. Brill Library During the 1950s. (Bry does not appear in this picture)
(Courtesy of the A.A. Brill Library & Archives, New York Psychoanalytic Society and Institute)**]**

Bry certainly knew the canon: in 1953 she co-edited the *Bibliography of Early Psychoanalytic Monographs Under the Editorship of Freud.* (Bry, 1953) She was, from the beginning of her career, highly innovative. "Her annual reports, especially the report of 1950, are testimony of her initiative and resourcefulness," noted her colleagues in a tribute written after her death. (Stern, 1956) "Besides restructuring the library and putting it on a firmer basis she initiated many new activities to make the library a truly educational resource for the students and members of the institute as well as a cooperative resource for other psychiatric, mental health, and scientific libraries in the community.

Psychoanalysis in America

The history of psychoanalysis in America is largely the story of a handful of psychiatrists–James Jackson Putnam (1846-1918), Abraham Arden Brill (1874-1948), Smith Ely Jelliffe (1825-1911), and William Alanson White (1870-1937) most notably–whose enthusiasm and persistence made it possible for the revolutionary ideas being espoused by Sigmund Freud in Vienna to take hold in this country.

In 1907, two years before Sigmund Freud's historic visit to Clark University, White and Jelliffe cofounded *The Nervous and Mental Disease Monograph Series*. For the next thirty-two years, this venture produced sixty-four titles, including translations and original works in English that helped to foster the spread of psychoanalytic knowledge in the English-speaking world. Their list included by the first English translation (by Brill) of Freud's *Selected Papers on Hysteria* (1909), Karl Abraham's *Dreams and Myths* (1913), A.E. Maeder's *The Dream Problem* (1916), Freud *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex* (1918), and Sandor Ferenczi and Otto Rank's *The*

Development of Psychoanalysis (1925). For many years White's own *Outlines of Psychiatry* (1907) may have been the first psychiatry text read by medical students in this, and his *Mental Mechanisms* (1911) was almost certainly that generations first exposure to psychoanalytic ideas by an American.

Psychoanalytic Roots

The idiosyncratic nature of the literature associated with psychoanalysis is worth noting, to be sure. The subjects and references in analysts' papers have always been wide-ranging and culturally-informed: artists, writers, historical figures, and fictional characters are all considered as evidence for psychoanalytically-based arguments. Unlike a medical library where the most up-to-date information is the *sine qua non* of cutting edge research, psychoanalytic scholarship is often based on decades-old articles and books. A 1931 edition of *International Journal of Psycho-analysis* (note, by the way, the hyphenation of "Psycho-analysis" in this instance – a fact that has tripped up more than one online researcher) is as essential to a psychoanalytic collection as the latest research on dementia or surgery would be in a traditional medical library. Conservation of older materials assumes greater importance than it does elsewhere, and "weeding the collection" takes on new meaning in such an environment.

In the 1985 issue of a short-lived journal called *Psychoanalytic Education*, for example, notable psychoanalysts of the day weighed in on what they considered to be the books and articles they believed had influenced them the most. For Henry Parens these included works by Freud: "Mourning and Melancholia" (published 1917); *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), and "Inhibition, Symptoms and Anxiety" (1926). Other writers cited by Parens included Otto Fenichel (*Problems of Psychoanalytic Technique,*

1941); James Strachey (the article, "The nature of the Therapeutic Action of Psychoanalysis in *International Journal of Psycho-analysis,* 1934), as well as Rene Spitz, for *The First Year of Life* (1965) "and several papers that preceded it by 20 years." Roy Schafer's psychoanalytic bookshelf included nothing less than everything ever written by Freud; Otto Fenichel's *Psychoanalytic Theory of Neuroses* (1946), and Ernst Kris's *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art* (1952). (Martin) Most, if not all of these titles remain in print today. The rocky road of credibility in the mental health profession has most recently been recounted by historian of science Anne Harrington. (Harrington, 2019)

New York

The New York Psychoanalytic Society and Institute is the oldest psychoanalytic organization in the United States, dating back to the founding of New York Psychoanalytic Society in 1911 by Brill. Brill, an early and ardent proponent of Freud's ideas has received a mixed press over the years; in *Camp Putnam*, his book about Freud's famous visit to America in 1909, writer George Prochnik describes the "brave, heavy-handed translations of Freud's work into English by the Austria-born A.A. Brill in New York." (Prochnik, 2006) Correspondence between Brill and William Alanson White during he spring and summer of includes Brill's requests for suggestions as to how translate such German words as *unbewusst* and *abreagiren*. (D'Amore, 1976)

The Institute library was duly named (and remains to this day) The Abraham A. Brill Library, and it is one of the largest psychoanalytic libraries in the world. Its holdings date back to the Society's founding and include over 40,000 books, periodicals, and reprints devoted to psychoanalysis and related fields. The Library's Special Collections and Archives are particularly noteworthy; they include papers of prominent analysts, oral

history interviews, photographs, manuscripts, and other memorabilia documenting the history of psychoanalysis. The 2,000-volume Rare Book collection includes many first editions of Freud's writings (among them a hard-to-find copy of Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, written in Russian and published there in 1915); complete runs of early psychoanalytic journals, and psychoanalytic and psychiatric books in over 20 languages. The photographic collection contains photographs of many early analysts as well as pictures depicting the history of the New York Psychoanalytic Institute and Society. (NYPSI.org).

There are, to be sure, other important American resources for psychoanalytic history. The Jewish historian Jacob Shatzky (1893-1956) successfully acquired Sigmund Freud's personal library for the New York State Psychiatric Institute library. (Harms, 1971). Sigmund Freud's papers, the subject of no small amount of conflict during the 1980s (Malcolm, 1982), finally found a home in the Library of Congress (Freud 2017). Ironically, perhaps, given the existence of a New York-based library named after him, A.A. Brill's papers are also housed in the Library of Congress. (Brill)

Clinicians (with and without psychoanalytic affiliations) have, over the years, belonged to a variety of professional associations that reflect changing priorities. The Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry, for example, was established at the end of World War II in response to the APA's perceived lack of responsiveness to the recurring emotional problems of returning GI's. Not surprisingly, perhaps, successive librarians at the A.A. Brill Library have taken their cues as members of professional associations with several different affiliations, including the American Medical Association; American

Psychiatric Association; the American Library Association (ALA), and the Special Libraries Association.

Orthodoxy

Despite Bry's more welcoming attitude, the Institute (and, consequently, the library) persisted in maintaining an atmosphere that largely catered to members. Although it has waned somewhat in recent years, a pervasive culture regarding the uniqueness of the Institute and a feeling of obligation to safeguard the purity of traditional psychoanalytic thought held sway. While students and researchers from other New York City-based training institutes frequently used the library, they have not enjoyed borrowing privileges. Non-members who speak at New York Psychoanalytic Institute "scientific meetings" are invariably identified as having "been invited." Bry, however, insisted on a broader perspective to what she referred to as "the behavioral sciences" was remarkable. After leaving The New York Psychoanalytic Institute, she became, from 1953 until 1957, the library associate in charge of the Neurospsychiatric Library at New York University (N.Y.U., Bellevue Medical Center). The interests of the new professionals with whom she worked and collaborations with librarians at other institutions broadened her perspective. With the help of Dr. Frank B. Rogers of the National Library of Medicine and Luther Evans of the Library of Congress she collected and organized "enormous files" of bibliographic information.

The job at NYU was to be Bry's last paid employment. From 1957 until her death, she devoted herself to her passion for bibliography and the lessons that could be gleaned from it. She led a very frugal life, subsisting on earnings from part time jobs and

a small pension from Germany as restitution for the loss of position as librarian, and by living frugally.

"Bry appears to have been completely devoted to her work, but the experience of emigration and loss of the world she had known in Berlin must have had an enormous impact on her," observes historian and N.Y. Psychoanalytic Institute Archives Curator Nellie Thompson. (Thompson, 2013) Bry's ties to Germany remain to be further explored in places like the The German and Jewish Intellectual Émigré Collections in the M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections & Archives at the State University of New York at Albany, and the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars collection at the New York Public Library.

The Mental Health Book Review Index and Sociobibliography

The high point of Bry's career occurred in 1959, when she created *The Mental Health Book Review Index* while serving as chairman of an Editorial Committee under the auspices of the World Federation for Mental Health International Council of Psychologists American Foundation for Mental Hygiene Research Center for Mental Health at New York University. The *Index* included reviews of books chosen by professionals from some 255 journals. It gave Bry an opportunity to share her deep and wide-ranging perceptions of trends in several interrelated fields as described in a 1960 editorial she wrote for the *Archives of General Psychiatry:*

> **The concept *behavioral sciences* emerged in the late 'Forties, a time of rising interest in the scientific study of man. Scholars in many fields of specialization felt the need to unify knowledge contributed to the understanding of human behavior from nearly all parts of the scientific**

world. The group of scientists who coined the term and later launched the journal *Behavioral Science,* chose the word "behavioral" from the psychologist's vocabulary because it was applicable to biological and social studies and acceptable to scientists in these fields as well. In the past ten years the "behavioral sciences" have, however, come to mean many different things, often depending on the meaning attached to the word "behavioral." It can have strictly methodological connotations, for instance, when referring to the observation of behavior in contrast to the study of inner experience. When the term "behavioral sciences" is used to designate certain social sciences, this often separates psychology from psychiatry and psychoanalysts. In such cases the behavioral sciences lose their significance as a focus for a bio-psycho-social orientation. (Bry 1960)

Thus was born "sociobibliography." Bry described sociobibliography in the editorials she wrote for the *Index* from 1959 through 1972. A glimpse at the titles she of her essays reflects Bry's evolving ideas about how one can derive important new information from well-chosen bibliographic entries. One piece considers nothing less than "The Behavioral Sciences and Mental Health in Relation to the Organization of Knowledge, the Organization of Science, and Bibliography." Another searches for "a Method of Identifying the Significant Monographic Literature of the Behavioral Sciences." The important work of book reviewers is acknowledged as "a Contribution to Scholarship by the Scientific Community."

In 1977, her colleagues, Librarians Lois Afflerbach and Marga Franck, selected 14 of Bry's essays for the posthumous volume, *The Emerging Field of*

Sociobibliography. "The editorials," noted her colleagues, "are centered around intellectual, scientific and semantic development of ideas and the terminology of the disciplines of the behavioral sciences." While she "stressed the role of bibliography as a means of communication of ideas, and she also stressed the importance of *not* communicating ideas that are no longer in keeping with current scientific ideological trends." Perhaps most significantly, the authors note, Bry "looked upon bibliography as a development of resources and the mirror for the reaction to and acceptance of new scientific ideas." (Afflerbach, 1977). (See also Lepore, 2018)

Bry's ideas were, early on, acknowledged beyond the library community: Manfred Kochen (1928-1989), who has been variously described as a mathematician, sociologist, and information scientist pioneer, expected sociobibliography "to meet two challenges: (1) provide reasonably complete and integrative access to knowledge on the most significant issues of our time and (2) reflect progress in the social sciences as an evolving branch of knowledge." Kochen, 1978) "The late Ilse Bry viewed entries in a bibliography the way an archaeologist views shards," wrote Swarthmore College librarian Thelma Freides, "…as material traces of an aspect of human activity, capable, like the pottery fragments of yielding insights into the purposes values, and daily practices of the culture that created and them" (Friedes, 1977). In 1977, the philosopher Henry Walter Brann wrote an appreciative obituary for Bry in the journal *Special Libraries.*

The author was able to find only one other use of the word "sociobibliography." It was used in hyphenated form by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida: writing about the "retrait" of metaphor he observes that "A *socio-bibliography* [itals his] would show it

just by counting the articles and (national and international) colloquia that have busied themselves with *metaphor* [itals his] for about a decade. . .” (Derrida, 2007)

In any event, the use of phrase “sociobibliography” did not survive much beyond the 1970s, and librarians tending to collections related to mental health have typically been a fairly disparate group. In the 1980s, the librarian at The New York Psychoanalytic Institute was a member of several professional organizations, including the Psychology/Psychiatry Committee of the Education and Behavioral Sciences section of the Association of College and Research Libraries, which itself comes under the auspices of the American Library Association. Librarians on that committee collaborated to publish a bibliography of “core” journals in a special issue of a journal called *Behavioral and Social Sciences Librarian* (Persson 1990). The book’s introduction significantly notes that its scope “does not extend to journals whose primary focus is related disciplines, such as anthropology, linguistics, sociology, and social work.” (Segal, 1990). The 16 distinct subject areas identified seem arbitrary (e.g., “communication systems” and “social processes and social issues and, although it is more recent, not as sophisticated as Bry’s earlier, more organic writings.

The challenge of making order out of large quantities of information is not at all unique to our so-called information age, nor even to the vast production and wide dissemination of printed materials following Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press. In *Too Much To Know: Managing Scholarly Information Before the Modern Age*, historian Ann M. Blair describes “evidence for the existence of ‘real” concordances to the Bible starting in the 1240s. These ‘concordances’ (called so at the time) offered an alphabetical index not of the words themselves of the theological concepts found in the

Bible (*realia*); in modern parlance they were subject indexes." (Blair, 2019) Scholars have described (often to wonderful visual effect) early efforts to make order out of quantities of information in the use of trees (Lima, 2014) and timelines (Rosenberg, 2010).

Organization is essential for material to be accessible, of course, but sometimes it can be limiting. Librarians have long been aware of the perils of using controlled vocabularies: a 1998 issue of *Library Trends* attempted to anticipate what lay ahead with an issue devoted to "How Classifications Work: Problems and Challenges in an Electronic Age": "Here the information science researcher becomes an anthropologist," wrote the editors. They must know "how to disambiguate terms, decide what distinctions are really necessary, and which are reflections of ephemeral debates or fads." Coping with sheer numbers of entries and creating some kind of internal consistency among entries is critical, though, and the authors conclude that there "are no *a priori* solutions," and that "each scheme must be taken in its own context of use." (Bowker, 1998)
In its *Intellectual Freedom Manual,* the American Library Association acknowledges that "it is important to understand the 'power' of a subject heading in providing access and index points, especially in an electronic environment where browsing depends so much on language of the headings." (American Library Association, 2002)

One of the most striking examples of the limitations imposed by the use of a controlled vocabulary is the creation of the long-lived, widely used Dewey Decimal System. Historian Wayne A. Wiegand has described the context in which Melville Dewey created it; one of Dewey's main points of reference was "the Amherst College tradition into which Dewey had assimilated and the curriculum through which he passed

between 1870 and 1874." (Wiegand, 1998) In addition to relying on prevailing perceptions of the hierarchy of knowledge, texts assigned by particular professors had more weight than others.

The dangers of a controlled vocabulary have been well documented in discussions of the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).* Now in its fifth edition, this "bible for psychiatrists" determines if a patient can receive insurance reimbursement for treatment by including (or not including) diagnoses. Ironically, various "diagnoses" have changed dramatically over the years, as evidenced by the APA's turnaround on the decision not to list homosexuality as a disorder. (Drescher, 2015) In the meantime, patients whose cultures describe ailments in varying (but often remarkably descriptive) ways are at a disadvantage as they seek treatment and then, more improbably, reimbursement.

In a recent piece called "There's Got to Be a Better Way to Organize the Books We Love," Maggie Anderson questions subject descriptions and bestseller lists (Anderson, 2018). Too much information without organization is equally dangerous: it's not enough for a work to be somewhere - it needs to be located to be used - and the same holds true for the digital environment. "An unindexed Internet site is in the same limbo as a mis-shelved library book, writes science historian James Gleick. "Searching and filtering are all that stand between this world and the Library of Babel." (Gleick, 2011) Sometimes, though, it seems as if institutions are casting too wide a net. In their latest efforts to make books more "accessible" to what they often now refer to as their "clients," public libraries are re-shelving titles away from regular Dewey or Library of Congress numerical order, into niche subject areas that are supposed to reflect current trends in

reading. So, for example, despite having a 616.849 call number on its spine, Benjamin Reiss's recent book, *Wild Nights* has been assigned to a "Health & Wellness" section of one local library, but not before being further separated out for a spell on the "New Books" shelf. (Reiss, 2018) In that same library the title, *The Book* ("A cover-to-cover exploration of the most powerful object of our time") by Keith Houston was assigned the number 002.09, labeled "Literature," and shelved in a lovely but not particularly accessible "reading room" far from related numbers. Unassisted browsing often seems like a thing of the past, and the wonders of "serendipity" (finding a book that's even better than the one you set out to find) are sadly diminished. *Library Journal*, a venerable stand-by for collection development librarians, has simplified the matter by just dividing things up between "fiction" and "non-fiction."

The electronic age has greatly multiplied bibliographic possibilities and it may be argued Bry's ideas seem even more pertinent today. The widespread availability of online information, however, obviates the need to have every potentially relevant physical object at hand. A wider, more nuanced perspective on the uses of information poses challenges for librarians, archivists, and curators who must decide what they want to make immediately available to users of their collections. While museum and library professionals will always have curatorial responsibilities, their adept use of current awareness resources, and, most importantly, interpretative and critical thinking skills will be called into ever-greater importance. The recent appearance of the *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* seems evidence of this. (Lau, 2017)

It is worth noting that Bry herself wrote an editorial anticipating "Bibliographic Challenges in the Age of the Computer." ". . . as automation advances," she warned, "we

must watch out: it may claim as drudger and take off our hands the work-a-day

experience that may trigger the imagination and creativity for which we are supposed to

be freed." (Afflerbach, 1976, p. 68).

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New York Psychoanalytic Institute and Society Library, nypsi.org. The Archives of New York Psychoanalytic Society & Institute papers going back to 1911; the Joint Activities of the Society and Institute; the A.A. Brill Library; the Treatment Center; and the Kris Study Group. Special Collections include a 2,000 volume Rare Book Collection, papers of prominent analysts, oral history interviews, photographs, manuscripts, and memorabilia documenting the history of psychoanalysis, including *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, and papers of Berta Bornstein, Mary O'Neill Hawkins, Max Stern, Fritz Wittels, among others. Oral histories include interviews with Jacob Arlow, Viola Bernard, Charles Brenner, Charles Fisher, George Gero, Mark Kanzer, Jeanne Lampl-de Groot, Dora and Heinz Hartmann, Edith Jacobson, Marianne Kris, Rudolph Loewenstein, Bernard Meyer, Burness E. Moore, Else Pappenheim, Isidor Silbermann, Leo Stone, and Nicholas Young. The photographic collection contains photographs of many early analysts as well as pictures depicting the history of the New York Psychoanalytic Society & Institute. Material in the Archives and Special Collections is made available to qualified scholars upon application to and approval by the Archives Committee. Contact: Nellie L. Thompson, Ph.D., Curator of Archives, nelliethompson17@gmail.com

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